

Remarks by Ambassador Arnold Chacon

Marine Ball

Friday, November 22, 2013

Vista Real Hotel

Thank you, SSgt Johnson for that kind introduction. I want to extend a special welcome to: His Excellency Fernando Carrera, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mrs. Carrera; His Excellency Manuel Lopez, Minister of Defense and Mrs. Lopez; The Honorable Retired General Ricardo Bustamante, Secretary of the Guatemalan National Security Council and Ms. Bustamante; Their Excellencies, The Ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Colombia and Canada.

And a warm welcome to all of you, my friends and colleagues, for coming tonight to celebrate the 238th birthday of the United States Marine Corps. This is a birthday well worth celebrating.

More than 1000 Marines serve side by side with diplomatic personnel in embassies and consulates around the globe. On behalf of all of us in Guatemala City, I want to express gratitude for the key role you play in defending and protecting our mission.

The Marines have always been known for overcoming whatever extraordinary odds are stacked against them. We are all familiar with the stories of legendary battles and bravery; their names are a pantheon of military victories: Belleau Wood. Guadalcanal. Iwo Jima. Inchon.

The spirit and commitment of Marines is captured in this quote: *To catch us you have to be fast; to find us you have to be smart; to beat us you have to be kidding!*

But we celebrate this birthday not only to honor these military accomplishments; we recognize that the history and culture of the Corps is integral to the history and culture of our nation.

John Philip Sousa was a Marine before he became the master of marches. He enlisted as an apprentice at age 13. Gene Hackman left home at age 16 to join the Marines. James Carville and Drew Carey were Marines before beginning the careers that made them famous.

The Marines are older than our Declaration of Independence; older than the Constitution. They bring their unparalleled level of courage and commitment beyond the battlefield.

When an earthquake plunged Haiti into chaos in 2010, the Marines restored order and rebuilt hospitals, in addition to delivering critical supplies. The Marines restored electricity and cleared rubble after the Japanese tsunami. Just 2 weeks ago, the Marines were among the first on the scene after a devastating typhoon hit the Philippines, bringing the first shipments of water, food, generators, and other desperately needed supplies.

When a disaster occurs, many people move away from it; the Marines never hesitate to move towards it. Into the burning building; into the war zone; and into harm's way.

Few of us will ever be called to risk our lives for our country; few can even imagine the magnitude of bravery needed to climb out of a foxhole and move forward under fire or to fly into a disaster area.

But honor, courage, and commitment are not principles reserved only for exceptional times or exceptional people. Each of us can bring to our work and to our daily lives the courage to act with integrity; the commitment to do our very best and to be alert for opportunities to serve others.

The Marines have been showing us how for 238 years.

Now I would like to read a message from Secretary of State John Kerry's birthday message to the U.S. Marine Corps.

"I am honored to bid the United States Marine Corps the State Department's heartiest and most heartfelt congratulations on your 238th birthday.

As a Navy man, I had seen up close the remarkable professionalism, courage, and spirit that makes a United States Marine.

But now in my travels as Secretary of State, I've come on a different level to respect your incredible service every time I meet Marines stationed at diplomatic posts throughout the world. Your valor and dedication to country is humbling.

From Marines serving as advisors on counterterrorism, intelligence, and political-military affairs, to the Marine security guards who stand watch over our embassies, consulates, and missions, to the Marines forward deployed, either ashore or at sea – you perform your duty flawlessly, and we salute you.

Our Marines, especially those of you returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, have given more of themselves than most will ever know. How fortunate we are as a nation, how truly blessed, to have you – and what pride we can all feel that our nation produces such outstanding warriors who are willing to go first into the heart of the action.

The Marines have a special comradeship, a unique bond, and I've always said that once you're a Marine, you never stop being a Marine, even after you take off the uniform. Today we reaffirm our responsibility to keep faith and to celebrate the dedication of all who know the Lord's words that "greater love has no one than this – to lay down one's life for one's friends."

It is in that spirit that we remember all who served – and those who continue to serve side by side with the Department and its embassies abroad.

Happy 238th Birthday, Marines, and Semper Fidelis!"

Thank you one and all for joining us this evening. And a heartfelt thanks to Embassy Guatemala's Marine Detachment.

And finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to a member of our Embassy family tonight. Andres Beroud, son of Beatriz and Marc Beroud, has been accepted into the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis.

This is an impressive achievement, and it reflects the excellent character and many accomplishments of this young man. It's all the more special in light of his Guatemalan roots, and we are all very proud. Please stand Andres so that everyone can recognize you.